



# Good News

A publication of the Missouri Catholic Conference - The 2025 Legislative Session

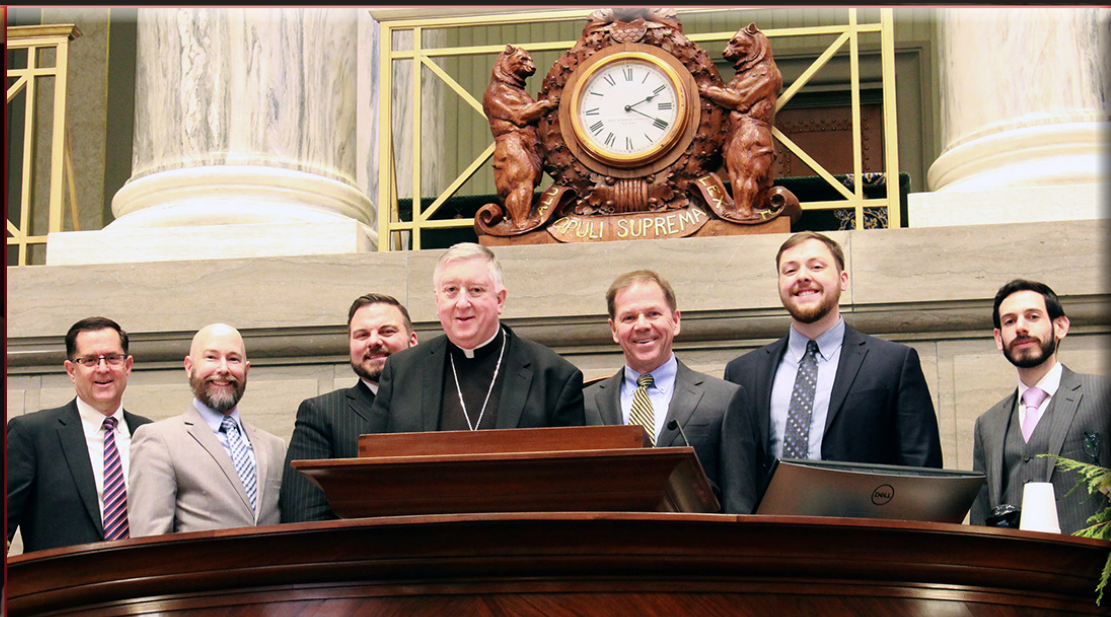
## 2025 Legislative Session



From left - Dr. Guillermo Villa-Trueba (MCC), Curt Wichmer (MCC), Jared Bryson (Catholic Charities St. Louis), Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski (Archdiocese of St. Louis), Governor Mike Kehoe, Bishop W. Shawn McKnight (Diocese of Jefferson City), Jamie Morris (MCC Executive Director), Deacon Tyler McClay (Catholic Charities St. Louis), and Tom Dempsey



From left - Msgr. Robert Kurwicki, V.G. (House Chaplain), Rep. James Patterson (Speaker of the House), Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski (Archdiocese of St. Louis)



From left - Deacon Tyler McClay (Catholic Charities St. Louis), Jamie Morris (MCC Executive Director), Jared Bryson (Catholic Charities St. Louis), Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski (Archdiocese of St. Louis), Lt. Gov. David Wasinger, Curt Wichmer (MCC), Dr. Guillermo Villa-Trueba (MCC)

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# Help Us Keep You Informed!

Dear *Good News* reader,

I hope you are enjoying the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) semiannual newsletter, *Good News*, and the other publications we issue, such as the MCC *Messenger*, which appears in the diocesan papers on a quarterly basis. We try our best to keep you informed about developing issues that pose great moral questions for our state and nation and alert you when action is needed. We encourage you to check out our podcast, MCC from the Capitol (available on our website, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts) in which we take a closer look at public policy issues and how they impact the Church.

With your help over the last several years, we have passed historic school choice legislation, including a statewide expansion of the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program that allows qualifying students to apply for a scholarship to Catholic or other qualifying schools. In 2025, the MCC will continue its work on a number of important public policy issues, including providing women facing crisis pregnancies with Alternatives to Abortion, repealing the death penalty, ensuring adequate social services and healthcare for the poor, and promoting educational opportunities for all school children, including those attending Catholic schools. In addition, we will work with legislators to craft prudent legislation to protect the welfare and dignity of pregnant mothers and their unborn children after Missourians narrowly approved Amendment 3, enshrining a right to abortion in the State Constitution.

The MCC will not succeed in any of these efforts without the involvement of committed Catholics like you. Without your help, the needs of the most vulnerable among us are likely to be forgotten in the halls of Congress and in our State Capitol. That is why the MCC wants to stay in contact with you—so you know what is going on and can respond by contacting your elected officials when critical legislation is pending.

You currently receive our communications for free. At this time, I am asking you to consider a donation to help the MCC. If you can afford to give \$20, \$30, \$40, \$50, or more, your donation will help us to continue providing you with our MCC publications. To make a donation, please use the envelope provided, or visit our website ([www.mocatholic.org](http://www.mocatholic.org)) to donate by credit card. If you cannot give a donation at this time, you will still continue to receive *Good News* at no charge. If you would prefer to receive our information electronically, please contact us with your email address.

Thank you and God bless!

Sincerely,



Jamie Morris  
Executive Director and General Counsel



The Missouri Catholic  
Advocacy Network

Text MOCAN to 50457  
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Join the 10,000 + Catholic Missourians who make up MOCAN. If you're already a member, encourage your family, friends, and fellow parishoners to join! As MOCAN grows, so does the Catholic voice in Missouri's Capitol. Visit [mocatholic.org](http://mocatholic.org) or send us an email at [mocatholic@mocatholic.org](mailto:mocatholic@mocatholic.org) for details.

# 2025 Legislative Session

The 2025 legislative session is now underway, and there is a feeling of optimism in the Capitol that has been missing in recent years. While some things remain the same—Republicans and Democrats hold the same number of seats after the 2024 General Election, and the GOP retains a supermajority in both chambers—there has been a change in tone in the first weeks of session.



*From left - Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski (Archdiocese of St. Louis), Governor Mike Kehoe, and Bishop W. Shawn McKnight (Diocese of Jefferson City)*

Rep. Jon Patterson (R-Lee's Summit) was elected as the Speaker of the House in bipartisan fashion. Patterson, the first Asian-American speaker in Missouri history, received 152 votes to 10 votes for Rep. Justin Sparks (R-Wildwood). Rep. Patterson's priorities include expanding access to affordable childcare in the state and limiting abortions after Missourians narrowly passed Amendment 3 in November.

The Senate also made history, unanimously electing Sen. Cindy O'Laughlin (R-Shelbina) as the first female President Pro Tem of the Missouri Senate. In her introductory speech, Sen. O'Laughlin set out her agenda, focusing on the foster care system, education, and children's health.

While the first day of session in the Missouri Senate included many of the same traditions and ceremony as prior years, one thing was notably absent this year—the public disagreements between two GOP factions that had at times brought Senate work to a standstill and led to record low numbers of bills being passed out of the chamber in the prior two years. Many are hopeful that there will be more cooperation, and greater productivity, this year.

On January 13, Mike Kehoe was sworn in as the 58th Governor of the State of Missouri. Kehoe, a member of the Cathedral of St. Joseph Parish in

Jefferson City, is the second Catholic to serve as governor of Missouri and the first since Gov. Joseph Teasdale, who served from 1977-1981.

Continuing on a theme from his campaign, Gov. Kehoe has stated that one of his priorities is improving public safety. He called on the General Assembly to pass legislation to place control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department with an appointed board. At his first State of the State address on January 28, Kehoe also outlined proposals on at least two issues of interest to the MCC.

During his speech, Gov. Kehoe indicated his strong support for school choice in Missouri. He proposed putting an additional \$50 million into Missouri's private school scholarship program, MOScholars, and urged lawmakers to pass a public school choice bill.

After Missourians narrowly passed Amendment 3 legalizing abortion in the state, Governor Kehoe said that lawmakers are there to "be a voice for families, children and those who can't speak for themselves. That includes the unborn." He announced a proposed \$4 million increase

to Missouri's Alternatives to Abortion program that offers support services, counseling, and adoption assistance for pregnant women in the state.

"Regardless of how you voted on Amendment 3, Missouri has so much more to offer women," Kehoe said. "In Missouri, there are better, safer choices than abortion, and we are committed to helping pregnant women know these exist, including the incredible Pregnancy Resource Centers across the state."

The session started off quickly for the MCC staff as they testified in the House on legislation to address the lack of access to affordable child care, to reform aspects of the state's criminal justice system, to protect colleges and universities from discriminating against belief-based student groups, and on multiple bills seeking to punish illegal immigrants. To see bills the MCC has a position on, visit our website at [mocatolic.org](http://mocatolic.org).



*From left - Sen. Mary Elizabeth Coleman (R-22) and Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski (Archdiocese of St. Louis)*

# 2025 Public Policy Priorities

In faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks through education and advocacy to create a culture that respects the sanctity and dignity of all human life, especially the most vulnerable among us. In the light of the moral teaching of the Catholic Church, the MCC and the Missouri bishops call government officials, legislators and all citizens to a respectful discourse about the challenges facing our state and nation. This agenda does not reflect all of the MCC's concerns, but those calling for action at this time.

## Protect Human Life

Recognizing the right to life is the foundation for all other human rights, the MCC will defend against violent attacks on human life, such as abortion, euthanasia, experiments involving the destruction of human embryos or the use of aborted fetal remains, and the death penalty. The MCC will support a culture of life that provides alternatives to abortion for mothers who choose life for their children, and alternatives to the death penalty, such as incarceration that protects the public. "It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop." (Saint John Paul II, *Gospel of Life*, No. 101)

## Welcome and Accompany Immigrants and Refugees

The MCC will bear witness to the God-given human dignity of all



immigrants and refugees, including the undocumented and those displaced by war, persecution, and natural disasters, reminding lawmakers of the right of people to migrate to other countries. The MCC will urge Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform and provision and funding for refugee resettlement. "Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age." (Pope Francis, 2017 Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees)

## Advance Social and Economic Justice for All

Pope Francis calls for all people to hear the cry of the poor and to reform "unjust social structures" that deny basic necessities and opportunities for social and economic advancement. The MCC will support adequate funding

for Medicaid and mental health services, protection of social programs that benefit the poor, care for creation and the environment, and stronger consumer protections, including payday lending reform. The MCC will also support healing of racial and cultural divisions while working to build vibrant communities that serve the common good. "Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family,

and so on." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1908)

## Uphold and Strengthen Marriage and Family

Family is the basic cell of human society and the foundation of civilized life. Presently, the institutions of marriage and family are threatened by a culture that no longer values authentic marriage and stable families. The MCC will support legislation and funding for programs that encourage two-parent families and provide assistance to single parents and their children; promote responsible parenthood; assist victims of domestic violence; and, help families who are poor or have children with health problems or disabilities. "The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2210)

# 2025 Public Policy Committee

## Archdiocese of St. Louis

Deacon Chris Ast

Jill Burkett

Shawna DuBois

Deacon Patrick McCrudden

Mark Mueller

Deacon Jorge Perez

Deacon Pat Waldschmidt

## Diocese of Kansas City- St. Joseph

Nicolette Gibson

Deb Sheppard

Annette Weeks

## Diocese of Jefferson City

Joshua Allee

Deacon John Hill

Dr. Erin Vader

## Diocese of Springfield- Cape Girardeau

Deacon Tony Peters

Deacon Gary Steffes



### Defend Religious Liberty

The Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the freedom to exercise one's religious faith without threat of coercion is grounded in the dignity of the human person and that no person should be forced to act in a manner "contrary to his conscience," (*Dignitas Humanae*, par. 3). The MCC will oppose unjust discrimination against people of faith, including the targeting or registering of any particular faith, and will support religious liberty protections in all human rights laws. "[T]he right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself." (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*, No. 2)

### Support Educational Opportunities

All parents have the right, and should have opportunities to receive assistance when necessary, to choose the schooling most beneficial for their children and which stands in accord with their moral and religious convictions. The MCC will support educational opportunities for

all children in all school settings, be they public, private, or religious. The MCC will support financial assistance so families can meet their children's educational needs and work against policies that discriminate against children who attend private and religious schools. "As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2229)

### Reform Criminal Justice

The Catholic Church supports a criminal justice system in which the offender is held accountable, the victim receives support, and the community assists the offender in successfully re-entering society. The MCC will support meaningful reforms, such as allowing greater judicial discretion in criminal sentencing, along with reasonable possibilities for parole, and ensuring offenders have realistic opportunities for employment upon their release. "We believe that both victims and offender[s] are children of God. Despite their very different claims on society, their lives and dignity should be

protected and respected. We seek justice, not vengeance." (U.S. Bishops, *A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, Nov. 2000)

### Promote Civility and Faith in the Democratic Process

Saint John Paul II said that Democracy needs wisdom and virtue if it is to flourish. Pope Francis told Congress that the chief aim of politics is the common good. The MCC will encourage civility and bipartisan cooperation among elected officials, strong ethical standards for those in public office, respect for the rule of law, and measures that allow citizens to more fully participate in their government. "[R]esponsible authority also means authority exercised with those virtues that make it possible to put power into practice as service (patience, modesty, moderation, charity, efforts to share), an authority exercised by persons who are able to accept the common good, and not prestige or the gaining of personal advantages, as the true goal of their work." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 410)

# Citizen Recognition Awards



Each year, the MCC recognizes a Catholic individual, couple, or group from each of the four dioceses who strives toward the same goal: giving of themselves to better the lives of others. These award recipients exemplify good citizenship in promoting Catholic values in the public policy arena and in their local communities and parishes. The 2024 winners from each diocese are as follows:



**Chris and Leslie Schieffer** have been recognized in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Chris and Leslie have been instrumental in getting the Bridge of Hope Lincoln County Resource Center in Troy up and running. As President of

the Sacred Heart Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Chris wanted to know more about why individuals and families needed one-week stays at the Troy Inn and Suites and another weekly motel in town. After visiting the motels on many

occasions, Chris realized individuals and families needed affordable housing/shelter and supportive services. He coordinated a meeting with his Pastor, Father Mike Lydon, that led to the creation of Bridge of Hope. They formed an ecumenical board of directors for a new housing mission in Lincoln County, created the organization's by-laws, and began to think about a location for a transitional living shelter that could house individuals and families, including men and fathers. On April 1, 2024, after years of hard work and determination, Bridge of Hope Lincoln County opened its doors on a new, million-dollar shelter, with funding in place for the first year of operation. To date, the shelter is running near capacity and has already placed a family in permanent housing. Chris and Leslie's faith, passion and determination were the impetus behind the creation and success of Bridge of Hope Lincoln County.



**Deacon Michael (Mike) Lewis** has been recognized in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. In addition to his dedicated deaconate service, Deacon Lewis has been a strong advocate and change leader in the diocese for many years. Deacon Lewis is a member and leader of his labor union. He promotes the basic human dignity and rights of any worker. He participates in advocacy to ensure that the economy serves people. His activism includes working for a fair living wage, safe treatment of laborers, and fair expungement policies and employment screening. Deacon Lewis has been a member of the Kansas City Jobs with Justice Workers Rights Board since 2013. For over 30 years, Deacon Lewis and his wife Mary have served as pastoral associates at St. Patrick's Catholic parish and school. He has contributed to diocesan policy committees, the pastoral care committee, and participated in the selection and formation of deaconate candidates.

**Russell Kremer** has been recognized in the Diocese of Jefferson City. Russell is a witness to how Catholic social teaching can be the foundation of a reform for "agribusiness" in the United States, returning us to a food supply network that is based on the dignity of the



human person, the dignity of work and the rights of those who produce food, and which respects the essential priority of family and community, and our call to care for creation. A lifelong member of Our Lady Help of Christians Parish in Frankenstein, Missouri, Russell has also been a lifelong advocate of farming that is good for the environment, good for people, and respectful of all God's creation. He

exemplifies a Catholic who has studied "the signs of the times" and embraced his vocation as a prophetic farmer. He is a diversified family farmer and manager of Heritage Foods which is a national processor, marketer, and distributor of natural and organic protein products. Russell's farming enterprises include humanely and sustainably raised hogs and cattle as well as chemical-free vegetables, crops, hay, and timber. He has also participated in successful efforts to change farming policy, including convincing several state legislatures to

pass laws restricting antibiotic use in healthy livestock.

**Rick and Rhonda Cuba** have been recognized in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. Through Rick and Rhonda's leadership, the construction of Lifehouse Crisis Maternity Home has been completed in Cape Girardeau. The home provides pregnant, homeless women with a safe place to stay, and compassionate care for women and children. Educational material is also provided that helps women to attain the skills needed for gainful employment. After observing the operation of a successful maternity home in Springfield, Missouri, the Cuba's passion for a



maternity home on the eastern side of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau resulted in Lifehouse Crisis Maternity Home. Despite the impact of the COVID pandemic, material price escalations, and other challenges, Rick and Rhonda continued to work tirelessly to see this project become a reality. Lifehouse teaches the women how to succeed in society with its ultimate goal being to provide a better opportunity for the babies being born. Lifehouse is not an emergency shelter-type concept, but a long-term program aimed at helping the women and their families become self-sufficient, productive members of their community.



Missouri Catholic  
Conference



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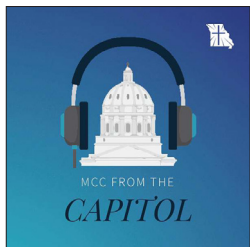
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**LATEST PODCAST: LEGISLATIVE ROUNDTABLE (scan QR code)**



*From left - Jamie Morris, Executive Director; Curt Wichmer, Legislative Analyst; Dr. Guillermo Villa-Trueba, Hispanic Outreach Manager*

**Upcoming Messenger: Immigration - Executive Orders & Legislation**

